

Episode 103: Adam saw no way out

Do you remember the movie called *The Fugitive*?

It came out in 1993, and it starred Harrison Ford as Dr. Richard Kimble, who was unjustly accused of murdering his wife. Throughout the movie, he's working to find the REAL killer. But at the same time, he's the target of a nationwide manhunt, led by a seasoned US Marshal – played by Tommy Lee Jones. It's a really good one.

In a scene from that movie, probably the most famous scene, Dr. Kimble is being chased through a tunnel in a dam and gets to the end, and stops – because it opens to a drop off of hundreds of feet down, into a huge amount of rushing water. The US Marshal catches up to him, and the chase is over for Dr Kimble, because there seems to be no way of escape. He has no way out. But then, he does the unthinkable – he jumps.

The story you're about to hear kind of made me think of that kind of scenario. My guest is Adam, and he was out on a mountain hike, enjoying the scenery and having fun. But suddenly, in a split second, he was in a precarious spot that he never expected to be in.

And he saw no way out.

Scott

Would you consider yourself a risk-taker?

Adam

Absolutely. Since I was a kid, I grew up climbing trees, going to skate parks, and doing all the big jumps off the big ramps. When I got a little bit older and joined the military, they gave me a route which was either having a clerical position or jumping out of planes. Between the two, I chose the jumping out of planes. We basically jumped out anywhere between 1,000 to 1,200 feet above ground level. I mean, it's one of my favorite things to do - jumping out of planes, any military thing that we could possibly do, all extreme sports, and snowboarding in the winter. The riskier the better. Obviously - don't get me wrong - the older I've gotten, I've gotten more responsibility as a parent and a person with a career. I've kind of pulled back on the ones that I can but if it's something I can do that has a risk attached to it, give me it.

Scott

I would guess that you have some broken bones in your history.

Adam

Not one. I got to find some wood to knock on. Every time I say that, it cracked me up because my mom and dad said, "You haven't twisted one bone, one joint, one ankle - nothing." I've been very lucky in my entire life throughout all the extreme sports that I've done. No matter how hard I've hit the ground, I've already figured out a way to stand up and keep going.

Scott

What amazes me is what you just said about you jumping out of planes 1000 or 1500 feet - that is very low! I mean, typical skydivers would jump out around 13,000 feet. I mean, you got to deploy almost as soon as you're out of the plane, right?

Adam

Yes. The concept behind that is when you go and jump the 13,000 to 14,000 feet, you're doing fun jumps, you're jumping out in tandem, it's your first time, and you're wanting to go see pretty sights - so, you jump out with somebody attached to your back. We actually have what we call a static line. So our pack tray - which is, kind of, like a bag - when we stand up in the plane before we actually jump out, we hook a hook onto an anchor line cable, which is a cable that is connected between the back and the front of the plane, and we all stand there and hold it. It's connected inside the plane. So, the second we exit, it pulls your pack tray open and deploys your parachute as you jump out. The concept of the height at that point isn't "Let's jump out and hang free for a while before we pull. It's like having 4 or 5 birds following each other into a potential combat zone and getting hundreds of soldiers and paratroopers on the ground as quickly as possible. The second you jump out, I mean, you're already on the ground within 45 seconds to a minute, depending on if you jump out with a combat load, which is the big rucksacks that we carry. So, as long as that thing is heavy, you jump out, it opens, you drop at 14 to 18 feet per second, hit the ground, ready to get into combat mode, and start heading out. For us, it's practice. So, half the time you're jumping with combat, half the time you're not - it's not necessarily for fun. Now, we do it for fun - don't get me wrong - but jumping that low is really quick to the ground.

Scott

I guess, obviously, the whole point is to get as many troops on the ground as quickly as possible, so you're not doing a joyful freefall.

Adam

Nope. They spend most of their time training with us, trying to figure out how to keep us from getting hurt from exiting and landing with that many people going out.

Scott

In spite of that, today's story is not military-related, even though you were in the army and are in the army - back then you were stationed in Hawaii. By the way, thank you for your service. This is about a hike that you went on one day. Where was this hiking spot? Can you describe it?

Adam

The hiking spot itself is called the Ka'ena Point Trail. If you're a family wanting to take a leisurely Saturday afternoon hike, to go enjoy the coastline, there's a hike on the northwestern corner of the island of Oahu, which is one of the main islands in Hawaii. At very top corner, there are two sides you can go to - the Mokolē'ia side or the North Shore side which is the side that's the easiest for me to get to from the Schofield Barracks, which is where I was stationed - or you can go all the way over to the leeward side, which is on the western coast. If you've ever been to Hawaii, there's one road that basically travels around the outskirts of Hawaii - it's just a highway - and it's a 2-lane road that goes along the coastline. I mean, you can do the whole island in a day unless you get caught in traffic. If you go over to the other side, that one road will take you an hour to an hour and 15 minutes just to get to that other side for the hike. Ka'ena Point is known for whale-watching. Everybody loves it. It's rocky. You can bring out some hiking shoes and do not necessarily need to have that much experience for the standard hike. You can go 3.5 miles out, watch some whales, enjoy the coastline, and literally walk right alongside a bunch of sand dunes. At the coastline, the water kind of hit the shore right there. You got this mountain range that's hilly - has sheer cliffs and has some that are just, kind of, nice gradual increases in their steepness on the edge. So it's not all just sheer - what you would call - 'drop-offs'. So you got this really pretty mountain range to your left. On the other side, you got the coastline. I mean, being new to the island, that was one of the first hikes we did. As an inexperienced hiker,

I wanted to, kind of, get my feet underneath me a little bit before we got out and did some crazier ones, but it's it was an enjoyable hike to do with a family if you're doing just a standard trail that's already paved out.

Scott

When you went, your wife Brooke stayed home with your 3 young kids. How old were the kids at that time?

Adam

They were all younger than 10 years old.

Scott

So they were young kids but, you said, sometimes, you take the whole family and do this?

Adam

Yeah. We took the kids. We put my youngest in one of those little backpack things that you can carry him in. In the other ones we've walked, you bring your water, bring your food, put them in the backpack, and just kind of take off. So, the actual trail itself, like I said, the one that you can see paved out in front of you is flat with rocks, but it's not necessarily something children couldn't do - they may walk it slowly, so it takes a little persistence and patience on the parents' side.

Scott

So that day, you went on your own. Take us through what happened on that day.

Adam

This was a Friday. For us, we work full-time schedules. I mean, we got to be there for PT first thing in the morning at 6 AM. Anytime we get released early, it's a blessing because we work long days, overnight, sometimes long hours, and early mornings. It was a Friday when all of a sudden, we got an email from our brigade commander. A full bird Colonel sent emails out to all the commanders at the company level, "Okay, release your soldiers by noon. Half-day." So, all of us had our hands in the air. "Yes, we get a free day!" The first thing I thought of is, "What can I do to fill my time? I'm not going home and sitting on my couch in Hawaii. I just got here." I mean, we got there at the end of December 2015. It was April 1 of 2016, so I've only been there for a few months and I've only done a couple of things. By that point, I was like, "I want to go out there and try to get some hikes in." This hike that I went to was one of those where - as I was going down that hike during one of the first few times I did it - I witnessed people going up the side of that mountain. I'm like, "You know what? I'm going to plan that for the future when I get an opportunity and my kids aren't with me."

So, we got a half-day off. I called my wife and I'm like, "Hey, we got released early. What would you think if I went on a hike? Would you mind?" I mean, she didn't mind necessarily, but she wasn't too ecstatic about me going by myself. She didn't know how dangerous it was. I didn't think that it was dangerous. Like I said, due to my risk-taking, a hike versus what I usually do - it's not like I'm hiking up the side of an embankment - it's not that big a deal. That kind of comparative analysis is really not that bad. So, I called her and she's like, "If you're going alone, do you really think that's a good idea? I mean, especially with the ones in Hawaii." I kind of talked her into it, like, "It's not that bad. I'm usually pretty good at these things. I'm athletic. I've got experience in many other extreme sports. So hiking is far down on that risk factor list." So, she's like, "Alright, if you feel like you're comfortable. I'm going to trust your judgment and take it from there." So, in hindsight, in 2020, I wish I would have had the opportunity to rethink this.

We're already issued CamelBak as part of our initial issue for the army. So, I ran home, grabbed my little backpack, Camelbak, threw some water in it, got some comfortable hiking clothes, shorts, a blue tank top, a ball cap, some hiking shoes, and walked out the door. I'm like, "I'm all psyched! I'm excited! I get to finally hike with a little bit more of an edge without my kids. I'm stoked!" So, I hopped into my car. I'm at Schofield Barracks at that time, which is about a 30-minute drive from the point of the hike, but that's not because of the distance or speed limits. Hawaii tends to be extremely slow because they're on island time. Nobody's in any hurry to get anywhere because all you got is the ocean sound and mountains. So, why rush?

So, I hopped into the car, about a 30-minute drive later, I ended up at the parking spot. At the last 1-3 miles of the drive, you're just driving down the coastline. So, you've got the coast literally right there on your right side and you can see it from your car. You've got this beautiful mountain range to your left. You drive by Dillingham airfield where there are private planes that they use for skydiving. So, if you want to go skydiving and tandem jump in Hawaii, you have to go over there. Other than that, it was just a normal drive. There's nothing specific about it that stuck out other than every other drive in Hawaii where you're just, in awe, driving up and down the mountains. There's really not a time that I was not wanting to take photos or a live view of something as I'm driving.

So, I got to my spot - it's not overly packed - it's a gravel parking lot that is, literally, probably, maybe, 200 or 300 feet from the shoreline. I park right there, hopped out, and started heading towards my hike. I don't know exactly where I was going to cut off into the little mountain range - I decided that I'm just going to take it as I go. I know that there are some other places that I saw people at but theirs looked a little bit too, I wanna say, easy - I know that sounds bad. I saw that the slant on theirs was just, like, "We'll take a leisurely back and forth on the ones that we did." I'm like, "Let's go try to find one that's a little bit more my speed."

Scott

You want to work up a sweat.

Adam

I want to work up a sweat. I want to be able to say I did something and have somebody go, "Oh man, that was awesome!"

Scott

Well, people were definitely talking about this afterwards, so I guess you got what you wanted, right?

Adam

They definitely were. So the hike itself, when you're going down, is rocks. Cars come down there if you can get a pass - it's a national park trail. You can get a pass to open the gate and drive, like, a Rocky 4-wheel drive vehicle down it. So, it's rocky enough that you're not really running it, but you're just taking a hike about, maybe, a mile to 1.5 mile down. I was kind of looking up to pick my spot - where I want to dip off. Between there and the actual start of all the inclines, there's still chest-high brush that's tearing into my arms as I was going by - I didn't really plan ahead for brush. So, I got through this area where I was, kind of, forging my own way. I was pushing through the brush, got to the incline, and got to the base of where I wanted to start going up. As I was looking up and gauging my route, I did find that there were other people on the mountain range - it wasn't people that I was hiking with. There was not a lot of people on the trail itself at the time. When I pulled up - that little area can hold probably a good

30, maybe 40, cars, kind of, if spaced out - there were about 5 cars there at that time. So, it really wasn't a busy hike during the day, especially on a Friday, which is surprising for a while because everybody usually takes off early on Fridays.

I got up to the spot and I'm like, "Alright, they're up that way. Maybe I'll judge my trajectory based on where they're at." There's a little switchback that starts cutting up to the left and to the right. At that point, there are not a lot of inclines at the mountain. I mean, there's really not a lot to say about getting up there - it was just a normal hike for me. When I got up to the top - as I said about me being used to heights - it only felt like a few 100 feet up and it didn't feel, like, anything crazy. So I got up to the top and got to a point where I can't really go any farther. The people that I had already seen weren't there anymore - I didn't see them, they were not around, I wasn't part of their little group. Obviously, they were not anywhere where I could see or call out to find if need be - I was all by myself. I got to this spot which is, kind of, hard to describe. From where I was at, I could not go any farther without it being any more dangerous than traveling forward.

Hawaii is known as being based off lava rock - it has all these different types of rocks that you sit and step on. So, as I'm not experienced with hiking in Hawaii, I did not know anything about how safe it was to walk on this one or that one - nobody told me this before. The area that I was standing on was what I thought to be stable. I turned around and was taking in my view. I mean, it's Hawaii, come on. I saw the Ka'ena Point, listened to the water hitting the shoreline, and watched a couple of people walking down the hiking trail. I was in awe taking it in. I was about to take some pictures but I, kind of, hit the top of where I wanted to hike to. I was just looking at what I had just done.

All of a sudden, the rock that I was standing on wasn't as stable as I had hoped - maybe, it was the volcanic lava rock that broke underneath my feet. I ended up sliding, say, 5-10 feet down - I'm not 100% sure - from where I was at. Where I ended up sliding down to was enough of an embankment against my back that I couldn't go back up. Luckily, as I slid down, the only thing that caught my feet or kept me from going past it was a bush. That bush was growing vertically out of the side of the hill and my feet landed into it. As I kind of took in what just happened, I kind of looked around the base of the bush only to find that there was a steep drop off. On the other side of that bush, there was an embankment. There was, like, this grey rock, this porous rock, that looked like it was almost a sheer drop, maybe 125-200 ft - I'm not 100% sure on the height and how long before I would have hit the ground. There was a sheer drop.

Scott

You were stuck at that spot and it was more than 100 feet off the edge of the hill?

Adam

Yes. There would not have been a chance for me to recover if I would have gone over that bush. Like, what I've told you from the beginning about me being a risk taker, I don't have many memories of a situation where I had no way out. I am extremely athletic. I've done, say, gymnastics but I didn't do it professionally. I was very good at tumbling and doing flips. I was very body aware when I was younger. I'm very athletic - every sport under the sun. So, for me to be in a spot where I can't climb up, I can't go left, I can't go right, and if I go down, that's my demise, that's my end, I was in a no-win scenario, I had no way out of this. I have never been in a spot where I am fearful of the fact that I might not go home today.

This bush is literally the only thing keeping me from going over that edge. Beyond that bush is still an incline. That bush was coming out of the slump. The second that bush is gone, my feet

would slide over the ground on the rubble underneath my feet and I would have gone over. When I slid down, my back was against an incline that was extremely steep. So, I had nowhere to go from my backside. When I looked to my left and right, there was nowhere for me to climb out of there. The only way out for me would be down - that was not an option at the time because that would be my end. I had never been in a position like that before - where I had no options and I feared for my life. Now, don't get me wrong. I mean, I'm terrified of jumping out of a plane every single time I do it, but when you do it and the chute opens, you're good - you're scared for 10 seconds. As you jump, your chute opens. If it doesn't, you have a reserve. So, that second parachute is your backup. There were no backups here - I had no rope, I got no parachute, I got nothing to save me. So, I'm in a position where I have nothing but this bush holding me from going over the edge.

Scott

How big was the spot you were standing on?

Adam

If you were to look down a couple of feet to my left and my right, there was enough of an incline that wasn't so steep, but I would go off the edge if I move my foot over there. I'm leaning up against the incline, so I'm not able to put my feet backward anywhere. I was sitting on my foot - almost, kind of, like, a forced Indian style of sitting, except I'm sitting one foot at a time. As I was sitting there, I sat on my left foot and then alternate back and forth to my right foot. Because my foot was going numb, I had to sit one foot at a time based off of the limited space I had right there in front of that brush. I sat there. I did grab my phone initially to look at it. I didn't know if I want to make a call yet. Do I need help? So I looked at my phone. Certain phone devices have that emergency setting where if your phone's extremely hot, it goes into that temperature-saving mode - so, it was in that mode. I grabbed it, it was so hot, it said that the phone needed to cool down before I could use it. Luckily, I had iced water in my CamelBak. So, I threw my phone into the backpack and let it sit there for a minute.

Well, what do I do in the midst? I mean, I was not just going to sit there for an hour doing nothing, so I looked down and saw a couple of people coming on that standard hike that was right in front of me. Can they hear me? I have no clue, but I'm going to take my chances because I'm in an emergency situation. I'm going to scream at the top of my lungs. So I did that a few times - I don't even know how many times I did it - but I got absolutely nothing in return. Then, common sense hit me. There is an ocean immediately to their side - I don't know if anybody knows the sound of the ocean being added. I mean, you could be down at the ocean and screaming at somebody, but as long as that whitewash hits the coastline, it's loud - my voice didn't carry enough to make any difference to those people down there. Nobody even thought to look to their left. I was waving my hands - it didn't help. I was screaming at the top of my lungs and didn't get any assistance from anybody. I was probably doing this for 15 or 20 minutes - I'm not 100% sure on the timeframe here but it seemed like forever because my phone was hot and I had no way of calling anybody at that moment even if I wanted to. It was one of the scariest things to see your lifeline - to making a potential phone call for help - is not working for you right now. That just gave me this sinking feeling in my stomach. "All right, there goes one of my options. So let's try screaming."

I want to say it took about 20 minutes for it to actually cool down. So whenever I took it out of my CamelBak, it was cold. The actual phone was cold because I had ice and water in the CamelBak and I tucked it in between my back and the bladder of the bag. I took it out, held it up underneath my arm where the shade was, and just kind of held it there, hoping that it would just kind of come on in the next couple of minutes. After a few minutes, it did - there's no specific

timeframe that I can give you on that one. I just looked down at it and it went into the original settings that it was on. So, I unlocked it. The next phase of my terror moment when I looked down, I went, "Wow, I have no service at the top! Not one bar!" It said no service. I didn't know that. I didn't know if this is standard. Being able to call 911, kind of, circumvents that 'no service' thing - it goes off to specific towers and pings and has a different availability to be able to call for emergency services - but making standard calls to, like, my wife or friends or family, I would have no service. So I'm like, "You know what? I'm going to try, regardless. I'm just going to put in '911' and see if I can get it."

Before I did that, there was a little bit of, I would say, a personal battle that I was going through. When I got stationed in Hawaii, one of the first things they gave us on our in brief was, "Hey, if you're going to hike, enjoy the island, do all the fun things, but there are a few unsanctioned hikes - there are a few places that are illegal." They named a few of them - this wasn't one of them. They wanted to let us know that if we were on a hike that wasn't sanctioned or legal, and if we were caught doing it or had to receive assistance of any kind, there could be punitive action. I'm not 100% sure what they would do, but they're letting you know that there are consequences to your actions, so don't do these things. So being a young soldier, I didn't know if what I was doing at that moment was falling in those guidelines of what I shouldn't be doing. I sat there looking at my phone before I made that '911' call, going, "Do I want to live? Or do I want to potentially put myself at risk with my job that I'm only at my second duty station? I want to do this for my career, so I don't want to ruin that. What do I do? Do I try to take my chances and get myself out on my own even though I feel like I have no way out? Or do I just try and make my phone call and hope for the best?" After a little bit of getting over my pride, getting over my fear of reprisal or from punishment, what would it be, it's going to be my life - that was my choice. Like, I can go get another job. They can separate me from the military. I'm going to go for my own safety.

Scott

It's amazing to me that you start off just going on a fun hike one day, and there you were fearing for your life and making life choices like that. Things can change so quickly.

Adam

Absolutely. I didn't even think that I was gonna be in that position. I mean, nobody plans to have something life-altering happen at that moment. It took about, honestly, 5-7 minutes before I got '911' on the call. The emergency operator answered.

(911 Call)

Adam

I'm at the Ka'ena Point Trail on the north side of the island, somewhere between where you park and where the point is. There's a hiking trail that I went up to. It looked like it was a hiking trail but it's not, and I'm kind of stuck.

911 Operator

You're stuck?

Adam

I'm stuck in a very, very steep place where I'm not able to get down.

911 Operator

Yeah, I can see where you're at. Where did you start from?

Adam

Right off the trail. There was a trail that went right off of whatever that Ka'ena Point Trail is.

911 Operator

Okay, stay on the line with me. I am going to set out trucks for you right now. Okay?

Adam

I'm high. Like, it's not trucks.

911 Operator

Yeah. Well, we're gonna send trucks and probably Air One out too - that depends on the captain. Okay?

Adam

I can't move. Honestly, this is probably the first time I've ever feared for my life.

911 Operator

Okay, stay on the line and do not move. What is your name?

Adam

Adam. I really don't want to get in trouble with the people I work for.

911 Operator

Okay, what trail did you start from?

Adam

North Side Ka'ena Point - I don't know what side. It was the only trail I saw that split off from the road trail. It kind of looks like it zigzags up the mountain and it looks very safe. Then it got really steep and I can't go back down.

911 Operator

Okay. So, are you the only one? You don't have the name of the trail, right?

Adam

Just me. Just one 28-years-old male.

911 Operator

Okay. How long have you been hiking?

Adam

I've hiked for a while but this is...

911 Operator

How long did you start your hike from? What time?

Adam

About 45 minutes ago.

911 Operator

45 minutes?

Adam

Yes, sir.

911 Operator

Okay, how did you get to the trail? You drove? Took a bus?

Adam

I drove up to a parking spot and walk.

911 Operator

Okay, what kind of car do you have?

Adam

Kia Sorento Black SUV.

911 Operator

Okay, Black Kia Sorento.

Adam

2011 Kia Sorento parked on the northwest entrance.

911 Operator

Okay. The rescue truck has started moving. I'm going to call and patch you to them, so just stay on the line with me, I've got a few more questions for you, okay?

Adam

Okay.

911 Operator

Okay, so your name is Adam and you're how old?

Adam

28.

911 Operator

Okay. What kind of clothes are you wearing right now?

Adam

I'm wearing a blue tank top, a blue and black hat, cargo shorts, and red shoes.

911 Operator

Okay, so you got stuck up there, right?

Adam

Yeah. If I start going back down, it's like a steep incline.

911 Operator

And you got stuck on?

Adam

I don't know. I can't give you a great idea of where this is. There wasn't a specific name for the trail.

911 Operator

Okay, are you hurt in any way?

Adam

No.

911 Operator

Okay. Is there any power lines that are above you or anything like that?

Adam

Above me is zero power lines. There's probably, maybe, a good football field at my left going up the mountain - there are powerlines that way but nowhere near me.

911 Operator

Do you have a flashlight on your phone?

Adam

Yes.

911 Operator

All right.

Adam

This is the first time I've gotten to you guys. I've been up for a little bit.

911 Operator

Did you try calling earlier at all?

Adam

Yeah, I've tried calling 911 for, probably, the past 15 minutes.

911 Operator

Okay, what is the battery life on your phone?

Adam

63%.

911 Operator

Okay. Hey, Adam. We got trucks on the way already. As soon as that rescue truck starts responding, I'm going to patch you over to them. I'm going to have to guess, maybe, 20 minutes. Is it an iPhone that you're using, Adam?

Adam

I am.

911 Operator

On your cell phone, can you get to your Compass app without hanging up on me?

Adam

Get on my compass up?

911 Operator

Yeah. I just want to get a lat-long on where you are, exactly.

Adam

Can you still hear me?

911 Operator

Yup. I can still hear you.

Adam

Okay. My compass app is on.

911 Operator

Okay. Does it display where you're at? The lateral longitude.

Adam

Hold on. It looks like it wants me to calibrate it.

911 Operator

Oh, really? Okay.

Adam

Latitude and longitude, it tells me 21°39'55" N, 158°2'25" W.

911 Operator

I'm going to connect you to the rescue company right now.

Captain

Hello, Adam. Can you hear me?

Adam

Yeah. Again,

Captain

How much battery you have left on your cell phone?

Adam

62%.

Captain

Okay. How many are with you?

Adam

One.

Captain

Just you. How old are you?

Adam
28.

Captain
Okay. Are you hurt?

Adam
No.

Captain
When you started that trail, are you familiar with that trail?

Adam
I was familiar with the first part, then I tried a new part and I got stuck on something. I'm on a part of the trail but it's not safe. I got stuck.

Captain
Okay. Are you in a position where you can fall?

Adam
If I slip, probably. But I'm sitting okay.

911 Operator
Okay, just letting you know, cap, this caller has been trying to call us for the last 30 minutes. He just happened to get a 911 signal. So, do we want to hang up on him or do we want to keep him on the line?

Captain
His signal is bad?

911 Operator
No, his signal is good. We can hear him, but he's been trying to call 911 for the last 30 minutes.

Captain
Do you have his number?

911 Operator
Yes, we do.

Captain
Okay, so you can hang up on him.

Adam
After reading a paper about this a few days later, I found out that the emergency workers that were called to me were fighting a brush fire on the southeastern corner of Oahu at the time that this call went through. That helicopter had to be routed from another emergency back to their station to be rerigged and back up to me. So it wasn't something small to me, once I found out the response that I was getting. They kept me on the phone up until a 5 minutes before the

helicopter actually arrived on the scene. The truck was, like, talking back and forth with the original operator, "Do we need to keep this guy on the phone? He's lost us a couple times. Is it imperative?" Ultimately, it came to, "If you need us, call us back." Other than that, they'll be there in a few minutes. I got off the phone. It wasn't something I was really comfortable doing, but they've got other calls to make. They've already done their dispatching duties. At that point, they can't do anything else to help me. So, I got off the phone, sat there, and waited. As I said, it took about 5-7 minutes before I started hearing the rotation of the propellers. I saw them pass over my head, turned to their left, paused, looked over, and they found exactly where I was at. So, they were almost exactly on with where I was at. They didn't even have to, kind of, go up and down the shoreline to look for me. The coordinates that they received was almost spot on.

The helicopter used, I think it's called a cradle where they hook you around the waist and underneath like you would do if you're going to go rock climbing or something like that. It's a little bit more simple because they have to get you quick. They made a couple of passes because it was windy that day, especially being on the shore. The shore tends to be extremely windy because they're getting the trade winds from the coastline. The helicopter came by a couple of times, I want to say, to gauge the wind as they made their approach or they are going to get pushed back because, with the position I'm at, they had to get the guy to where he could swing up to me. So, as they made a couple passes, I saw the guy getting in his position on the edge of the helicopter that he opened the door from. He had his rig on and he dipped himself between the side of the helicopter and the landing gear. He went in between the helicopter and dropped straight down. At that point, he was 15-20 feet down. What they started doing is lowering him down and taking passes. They took another couple of passes to make sure they were close enough to get him 30-40 feet underneath the helicopter. He was dangling by this rope on his harness. They make a pass, they got him up, he reached out for the brush, missed it, and kind of swings back out. The wind, as I said, played a humongous factor coming off the top of these mountains.

On the third pass, they got him up on the edge to where he grabbed onto the brush. Then, he pulled up to me and got his footing similar to mine. He kind of put his foot next to mine and use the bush in the same way that I was using to get his footing so that he could do his job. He was, like, "Alright, I'm going to hold on to this." He guided me through one hand at a time. "I need for you to right now put this around your underarms." So, he routed a strap underneath my left arm, around my back, underneath my right arm, and hooked it to his waist. His belt buckle is where I was hooked into. He handed me another strap. That strap went behind me, underneath my back, straight up through the center, and hooked back underneath his waist. This whole time, I was sitting there. I mean, I was looking up - there's a helicopter - I was looking at this rescue guy, I was looking at the drop, and I was thinking, "Alright, again, I love risk. But this scares the crap out of me. Like, are you kidding me?! I'm about to dangle on a rope hanging from this helicopter, and we're this distance up in the air." I mean, I had every anxiety and panic factor going off my senses. My nerves were just railing.

I truly am thankful and grateful for the attentiveness that that rescue worker gave to me at that moment because it wasn't like, he was not understanding of my position. He was, "Hey, it's gonna be cool. Hey, it's gonna be okay. I understand that you're scared. You're now hooked in. At no point will you fall from this point forward. We're gonna go on a lovely scenic ride and make a couple of jokes. People got to pay hundreds of dollars for this stuff and you're getting it for free."

Scott

I love that guy!

Adam

Yeah, he was very calm and cool. He had fun with his job. At the same time, he was reassuring. For somebody who's at a point where they think that they're not going to make it home, he was who I needed at that moment. He started giving commands back up through his mic on his headphone, and through his hand signals. He's like, "We're good to go!" Then, he coached me, he was like, "Alright, we're going to lift up, we're going to go up about 5-10 feet and then they're going to take us out from the mountain. Then, as we get closer to the shoreline, they're going to start to skirt the shoreline. He said, "We're going to go all the way down to an open field where they're going to sit us down. Once we get there, I'll tell you what to do. Just take this moment to just hold on." Basically, in a normal scenario, the position that I was in - I'll explain it to you because, I mean, it would be a little bit compromising - it's not the best thing to face some dude's crotch. But at that moment, you don't really care what you're doing. Those buckles went into his belt line. That means that I'm holding my arms and elbows around his thighs facing his belly. He said, "Grip my thighs for dear life as we're lifting up. Then, you can relax as we start coasting." So, I gripped.

I was facing this dude's belly when all of a sudden, we took off and started coasting. If it wasn't for this being a horrible day, I would have loved that view because, I mean, I was hundreds of feet in the air getting a shoreline dangle over Hawaii off from a helicopter. They kind of took a slow flight because if they go too fast, we would start swinging towards the back and there's oscillation that can happen which may cause us to swing back and forth - not too safe with landing. So with the speed they took, they made sure that they went safe. Five minutes later, we got to this open field which is closer towards the north shore of Hawaii, away from the hike itself.

As we were coming down, he was coaching me, like, "Alright, as we come down, you're going to be the first one to hit. What I want you to do is slowly let your heels hit, let your butt hit, let your back hit." He's like, "Have you ever jumped out of a plane?" I'm like, "Yeah, I do this for a living." He's like, "Then you should get this. You should understand what we're doing, but it's gonna be a lot slower. So, just lay on your back and I'll stand. As I stand up, I'll unhook you and you can stand up. So we went through the motions - I slowly sat down, I laid on my back. At that moment, the bird unhooked us. They reel that cable back in and the helicopter, kind of, swooped over to the side which is, like I said, enough of an open field to land at. There were a couple of fire trucks that were there. I don't know exactly what station they were from, but that station that was dispatched out was already there waiting on me to reassure me, to take me in, and make sure that I was happy, healthy, and there were no injuries. But yeah, that was the actual rescue story up until that point where I kind of got reconvened with the gentleman who rescued me. I was able to, kind of, tell him, "Thank you." I wasn't all there at that moment. It took me a minute to move away from that. What would you call it? I wouldn't say 'struck', I just came from a terrifying event and I wasn't all there mentally. It was scary. My brain hadn't yet reset, but they were all very, very attentive.

Scott

You still got the adrenaline surging, so it'll take some time to come down from that, for sure.

Adam

It took a few minutes because I was about a mile further down the road from where I parked - or it was a couple of miles, I'm not 100% sure. Basically, they flew over my car and dropped me a few miles after. So, they actually had to drive me back to my car. One of the fire trucks put me in the back of the engine, they were checking me, doing, kind of, vitals and stuff, making sure I

was good, asking me questions, and then got some of my personal information for their reports. I got back to the car. I stood outside my car for a minute, sat on the hood, and gathered myself because, as I said, I hadn't realized or understand everything that was done. Like you said, my adrenaline was pumping and I was still in that panic state. I'm like, "Okay, am I good to drive? Alright, cool. I'm going to get my car, I'm going to head home." So I got in the car, got on the phone, gave her a call, and I'm like, "I need to tell you something that just happened." That phone call, I think, was where the emotions came out because I probably had one of the hardest times talking through that. I think I had a little bit of a breakdown. I think my body decided to accept the fact that the shock moment is gone. What just happened is settling in and I was trying to talk through it. She was, like, not understanding how severe it was. Once she realized that emotion was there, the severity of it hit, and she was, like, "Adam, what is going on? What happened?" I'm like, "Give me a second to breathe." Once I did, I kind of talked through everything, explained that I went on the hike - and I didn't even dive into details - I slipped, got to a spot I couldn't get out, I had to get rescued, I got airlifted off the side of a mountain, and that was it. I didn't dive into the details because I didn't want to sit there and try to relive everything at that moment yet. It was, kind of, one of those things where you're thinking, "I just survived something and I'm very grateful, but also emotional at the same time." You could tell on her end that she was receiving the severity of it based on her responses to me. I mean, she was calm, caring, and wasn't trying to spike how I was feeling. You could tell she was trying to gather information from me.

Scott

Let's hear from Brooke and what she thought about that phone call.

Brooke

So I got this phone call from Adam when I was in the kitchen with the kids. I heard my phone ring and I answered it. The first thing he said was, "I'm okay." I thought, "Oh God, what is he about to tell me?" He said, "I was stuck on the side of a cliff and I had to be rescued, but I'm okay." My reaction to that was really a multitude of things. Initially, it was like the feeling that you get whenever you go over the top of a roller coaster and your stomach drops. I felt hotness all over my body because I thought this can't be real. Like, I know this happens to people but not me. Like, I told him, before he went on the hike, the rule of thumb in hiking is that you don't go hiking alone. They have it on all of the pages on Facebook for the hiking groups - it's just something you don't do. So, when he asked if he could go hiking, I said "No. I don't know how I feel about you going alone. Are you sure you want to go alone?" He was like, "Oh yeah, it's an easy hike. I'll be fine." I was like, "Okay. Well, have fun. Be careful." So, when I got that call, I was thinking, "You've got to be kidding me! I told you not to go hiking alone but you went and then you get stuck. That's why we don't hike alone." It was really scary. Even though he said that he was fine, it was still something you don't expect to hear when you answer the phone.

Scott

Was there any repercussion from the army about you going on that trail?

Adam

No, there wasn't. I found out that there was no fine from the fire department there to be rescued. If the trail was labeled as an illegal hike, there would have been - and it's around \$1,500. On top of that, there would be potential charges that they would file against you as well. Luckily, it was just a hike. I needed help, they rescued me, they made a report, and they continued on with the rest of the day. At that time, my rank was specialist. At that point, I wasn't a sergeant yet - I had not been promoted to a position where I had any soldiers. The person who was my direct line - first-line supervisor, as we call her, she was a sergeant - I called her and I'm like, "Hey, I need to

tell you something. I know we were just released, but I need to say something that happened just in case there's a report or they let the army know because they did get my military ID and took some information down today. I don't know if it will come down, but I want to warn you that I did a hike, I got in a position that I needed to be helped, I was helped, I was rescued by the fire department, and she said, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yes." She's like, "Okay. Well, as long as you're not hurt." It was one of those "Everything's okay. Why worry then? It's just gonna cause more harm than good." So, she said, "Well, do better from this point forward on if you're going - gauge where you're going, have somebody with you, and look into the hike before. So it's kind of what we do - risk reduction management - in the military. You look at what you're going to do, determine the risk factors, how to mitigate and control them. If not, don't go or try to go somewhere else. She's like, "Let's try to apply that next time. I'm glad you're okay. We'll see you on Monday." There was no further investigation. Nobody looked into it. No penalties. So what I was worried about sitting there determining whether or not it's my life or my career came to a 3-4 minute phone call that said, "I'm glad you're okay. Just don't do it again."

Scott

And that's the best outcome you could have even possibly hoped for.

Adam

Absolutely. I was expecting to be torn apart. The individual who I was speaking to tends to be more rough and harsh - it's the military, that's kind of the environment we're in. But at that moment, she was more caring and she put forth empathy towards my feelings. She could tell that I was going through something, so she wasn't gonna come down on me at that moment. It was just, "Make smarter choices from this point forward. I'm glad you're okay. Go be with your family."

Scott

So you didn't have any medical problems or injuries at all from this?

Adam

I didn't. Nothing physical, I will say. Like I said, this being the first event that I've had this much of a shock from a life or death scenario. It took me a few days emotionally to come back around. I felt quiet, calm, and distant. I was mentally contemplating a lot of the stuff that I went through, and you kind of start taking stock of, like, some things that are important in your life. It's like you start cutting out that chaff - the stuff that just wastes your time - and start enjoying things that you may have overlooked before. So physically, I was okay but, emotionally, it took a toll for a few days and helped me to, kind of, take a second look at who I am and my priorities.

Scott

Yeah, that's one of the things I was wondering about. A lot of people, after having been through what they perceived as a life-threatening experience eventually got diagnosed with PTSD even more than a few days or years later, but you're doing okay though. How long has it been since this happened?

Adam

2016. So, 5 years. On April 1, it will be 6 years.

Scott

That's kind of one of the funny things about the story - it happened on April Fool's Day. Whenever you tell the story, did you get people saying, "Yeah, right, I get it. It's a joke"?

Adam

Actually, yes. Every single time that I've brought it up, I'm like, "I promised you that this story happened. It just so happened on the day that you would think I'm gonna make the story up, but I've got proof."

Scott

When a rescue happens like this, does the fire department or the-- I guess, the helicopter was also part of the fire department, right?

Adam

It was, yes. Or it is, yes. It's a dual-purpose helicopter. So, they're usually there for fighting brush fires because there tend to be dry areas on certain sides of the mountain area. So, they do brush fires and rescues - that's their main purpose, like, that's what they're known for. When you see that helicopter flying, you're like, "Alright, who's going to get rescued?"

Scott

Do they normally send a bill to the person that got rescued?

Adam

I did not receive one. I'm not 100% sure if they do. I know if you take an ambulance ride, you get a bill. I don't know about the fire department since that's state-funded and it's not a private venture for people to make money. So, I'm not sure if that's something that they normally practice but I did not receive one. I just received, 'I'm glad you're okay' and I never heard from them again.

Scott

This is Scott jumping in for just a minute. As Adam, Brooke and I were working out the details about recording this conversation, I mentioned that I had acquired the audio of the 911 call that Adam had made from where he was stuck. Of course, they wanted to hear it. So, I sent it to them. They sat down together and listened to that call - the one you heard just a few minutes ago. I was curious about how Brooke felt when she listened to that audio.

Brooke

That was the first time I had ever heard the 911 call. I'm actually a 911 dispatcher, so I do a lot of 911 calls every day. Being on the other side of it was an interesting experience, to say the least, hearing my husband actually sounds like in a situation where he doesn't know what to do. He is a risk-taker. He does things that most people won't even think to do, but hearing him being stuck and having some form of fear in his voice, thinking about what he was feeling in that situation, hearing it firsthand was very emotional because that's my husband. I was sitting at home, probably, feeding the kids or turning on something for them to listen to, while he was on the side of a cliff. I mean, I had no idea this was happening. It was very jarring hearing him firsthand being stuck on the side of a cliff, not knowing what to do. Then, also, it's kind of cool hearing the other side too because - as I said, I do 911 dispatches - hearing the way they handled things, I thought the person who talked to him did a fabulous job because they were very calm and he didn't sound panicked or feed off of that emotion. Being his wife, I could still hear that fear in his voice as I know the difference. It was pretty cool hearing it because I felt like the guy that spoke to him did a really great job of keeping him calm - like, he had control of the situation. That's the first time I had ever heard it and imagining the fear that he felt and hearing it in his voice was a different experience.

Scott

To close out my conversation with Adam, I had one more question. How did you tell your kids? I'm wondering how they reacted to this or what questions they might have had.

Adam

I came at it slowly. I didn't want it to be a traumatic event for them. I wanted them to hear, "Hey, something crazy happened to your dad today." The last thing I wanted to do was have them feel how much it affected me. It was like one of those slow conversations that me and her used to approach them with. We didn't want to make it out to be some huge event. The kids were asking "Dad, what's wrong?" "He just kind of went through something today." I think it's the way that she approached it. They're like, "What happened?" I don't know if we told them that night or if it was a couple of days later, but I do know that it was like, "Alright. In case you guys hear about it or you, kind of, see me walking around a little bit off, I did have to get rescued off the side." It was funny because how they approached it wasn't necessarily, "Oh, are you okay?" They could see me standing in front of them - they know I'm okay. All they cared about was the helicopter and I got the dangle from a helicopter - they thought that that was the coolest thing. So, the conversation turns to be a lot better than I expected because, at the end of it, it wasn't, "This is horrible! How did this happen?! Oh, I'm so sorry, Dad!" Kids aren't really looking towards the trying to understand your thoughts and feelings, they're like, "Alright, you're alive! You're in front of me. So obviously, you made it through. How was the helicopter? Was that cool?" I thought that was funny. I thought it's a childlike reaction. That's all I can hope for. Even today, the young ones still don't really understand it. I have to remind them that this happened to me. When I told them I was going to be talking about it, their same reaction was, "Oh, what happened?" So obviously, it's not that traumatic of an event for them.

Scott

Maybe, in a few years, they can listen to this podcast and know what really happened.

Adam

Hopefully, yeah.

Scott

Adam's wife Brooke is a listener to this podcast, and it was her idea to have Adam come on and talk about what happened to him. So I want to say thanks to Brooke for suggesting this story.

And if you liked this episode, you might like episode 76, which is called "Gil fell of a cliff" – in that one, Gil didn't have the good fortune to catch a bush on the way down.

Gil

I had, kind of, pulled myself up and I could see that there was blood all over where I'd landed. I think the first thing I felt was my face. My lip had split completely down the middle - it was so widely split open that it actually felt like my lip was missing, it felt like I had completely bitten off my lip.

Scott

So check it out, again, that's episode 76 and it came out about a year ago.

Well, I have a big announcement. Our podcast listener group is moving back to Facebook. I know, you're probably thinking "What? Come on, Scott – make up your mind!" and yeah, I get it. But let me give you the whole story. As of a few months ago, we had over 2000 listeners in the

Facebook group and I made the decision to change our platform to a separate place, because I really wanted to get away from Facebook. For a variety of reasons that I won't go into here. So, we had our own online place where we could meet, chat, share things, all that stuff. And it does work really well – I don't really have any complaints about the service itself.

The problem boils down to this: it's a separate place. Everyone is already on Facebook, or almost everyone anyway. So to be really involved in this community of listeners, you had to remember to go to this other place, and for a lot of people it just didn't happen. Sure, we've had hundreds of people join the new community, but having everything over there just made it difficult, and it just didn't feel the same.

So not too long ago, I took a poll in that group, and I asked people what they thought. And it came out that over 80% of the members either didn't have a preference, or liked the original Facebook group better. Only about 17% liked the new community. And honestly that's kind of what I expected.

But then there was another reason. One of the listeners who joined the new community is Barbara, and she is completely blind. I asked her how the new platform compared to the Facebook group, in terms of how easy they are to navigate around without sight. Well, Barbara told me that the Facebook groups are a breeze – very easy for a blind person to use. And this new platform was nearly impossible – it's created without really any thought given to users who can't see the screen. And of course this is something I would have never realized, so I appreciate Barbara telling me that. I want to make the podcast and the listener groups as inclusive as possible. That's why we're also having all of the episodes transcribed – so that people who are hearing challenged can enjoy the content as much as everyone else.

So – with that said, the Facebook group is back open. The vast majority of people who were members there are still in that group anyway, so it will be a pretty easy transition. There are some downsides to it, but we'll just put up with it. If there comes a day when the group gets shut down by Facebook, so be it. That's a good reason to be on my mailing list, so I can still communicate with you if that happens. So if you're not already in the Facebook group, you can join at WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

Okay, enough of that stuff. Before we get to this week's Listener Story, I wanted to let you know that there's a new Raw Audio episode out – this one is episode 22. It includes 911 audio from a man who was threatening suicide –

(clip 1)

An elderly gentleman who was confused because he just witnessed a crime –

(clip 2)

And a young man who was upset because of what he said his girlfriend had just done –

(clip 3)

The Raw Audio episodes are bonus, exclusive shows that have actual 911 calls and the stories that go with them. You can binge all 22 episodes just by being a supporter of this podcast for \$5 a month. Not to mention, you get the satisfaction of being a supporter of What Was That Like! Sign up at WhatWasThatLike.com/support.

And now here we are at this week's Listener Story. And it's actually from this week's main guest, Adam. This story also happened in Hawaii, but it is completely unrelated to his mountainside rescue.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

(Listener story)

Adam

I was stationed in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii on the island of Oahu. On the morning of January 13, 2018, my son and I got up for what we thought was gonna be a normal morning. We had some breakfast. He wanted to play some video games with me, so we played. My wife and kids just happened to be on a vacation back in the states in Florida, so it was gonna be a nice, quiet morning. So I got up, made breakfast, ate, and then got on the Xbox to play some video games. I looked over saw and my phone next to me. I was sitting on the island in the kitchen looking into the living room when I saw a bunch of messages on my phone, so I unlocked it. The first thing that pops up isn't even those missed calls or messages. What is it? It's an emergency alert. I've never received any of those. The first thing it said was, "A ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill." Being an active-duty military member, you see "This is not a drill", it sets off a little alarm in you because, obviously, that means they're not playing, this is real.

So, I called my wife, ran outside, looked towards the western side of the island - being where we are in the Pacific - that's where you would make an assumption that this is where this is going to be coming from. I didn't know what I was going to see obviously, but you're not really thinking at that point. All my senses were heightened. I was, kind of, freaking out. So, I called my wife and asked her if this is real. I was asking what she heard. I was freaking out, grabbed my son, and hopped into the car. I'm like, "Alright, where can I go? Do I need to go over to my unit? Do I need to just seek shelter? What am I going to do? On post, we have shopping areas and grocery stores that we call commissaries, and the PX is that shopping area. Like, let's go into one of those big buildings." So, we started driving towards the PX. On the way there, we saw MPs passing us with megaphones saying, "Seek shelter. This is not a drill. Get to safety."

So, we finally parked, ran inside, found a place behind one of the portable ATMs, and started calling my family. Nobody was picking up. I got a hold of my brother and said goodbye. I got to talk to my wife and, again, I said goodbye. It was just one of those times in my life when I felt like I was never going to see my wife and kids again. It was real because there was something that was telling me this is not a drill. This is real. There is a missile inbound. There are not that many military locations that are in our area so, obviously, it's going to be us if they're aiming for a military central to the island. We're freaking out. So, making our phone calls and making all of our plans to say our goodbyes. About 38 minutes from the original text, we got one that said "Emergency alert. There is no missile threat or danger to the state of Hawaii. False alarm." So, a bunch of people was walking around inside the store going, "It's a false alarm! Everybody, it's a false alarm!" By this point, it doesn't really matter who was saying that it's a false alarm. You've already, kind of, thrown your emotions for a loop. That was probably one of the worst scares that I've been through in my life - having to sit there, holding my son, and wondering if I'm going to be able to make it through the rest of the day to see tomorrow.